

Alnwick Urban District.

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

Medical Officer of Health.

1905.

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For the Year 1905.

TO THE CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE ALNWICK
URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL.

GENTLEMEN,

In presenting my report for the past year I have departed somewhat from the stereotyped rule, inasmuch as I have divided the district into two separate parts, viz., that of the town proper, and that of the more rural portion of the district.

The sanitary area of the Urban District Council readily lends itself to this division, as on the one hand, there is a population living strictly a town life, and on the other one living quite a country life.

The division which seems to me to be most appropriate is to include in the town proper all that portion served by the public sewers (this includes two or three houses which may be disregarded), and to include in the rural portion, Alnwick Moor and the few additional houses in the district surrounding the town, such as Blakelaw Cottage, Alndyke, Bog Mill, &c.

I propose to give the vital statistics of the whole district in the first instance, and then to a certain extent subdivide them into the aforesaid localities.

WEATHER.

The weather experienced during the past 12 months does not seem to have influenced the death-rate to any appreciable extent. The wet spring and autumn with an abnormally dry and early summer produced a total rainfall of 27·46 inches, an increase of 1·18 compared with last year's fall, while the total number of days on which rain was measured was 172 compared with 167 in the previous year.

A comparison of the following table will show that in our driest months the greatest number of deaths have occurred, the highest number being in December.

		Rainfall.	Wet Days.	Deaths.	Births.
January	...	·80	9	11	9
February	...	1·16	13	6	19
March	...	2·27	19	9	21
April	...	2·53	22	7	14
May	...	·83	13	12	13
June	...	·96	5	9	13
July	...	1·03	13	5	12
August	...	4·40	19	11	24
September	...	1·87	15	17	13
October	...	4·35	23	7	19
November	...	6·63	23	12	12
December	...	·63	8	21	15
		27·46	172	121	184

There has been very little frost and snow during the past 12 months, and the hottest weather was experienced in the month of July. The dryness and mildness of the season has had a trifling influence on the respiratory death-rate, which is 2·05 per thousand compared with 2·08 last year.

Other rates are low in comparison, not only from the decrease in the total number of deaths but also from the fact that I have taken the population of the district at 6,800 as compared with 6,720 formerly.

I have estimated the population of Alnwick at the above number for the following reasons.

(1) The average birth-rate for the last ten years is rather more than seven per 1,000 in excess of the average death-rate. This approximately gives an annual increase of 50 in the population.

(2) At the time when the 1901 census was taken the population of the town was thirty below that of ten years before but at that time the Militia Staff with many of their wives and families were absent in Malta, but have since returned.

(3) During the last twelve months 62 dwellings have been completed and occupied, and taking the average number of persons per house, as shown by the last census to be 5·85, this would give increased house accommodation for 362 persons.

Allowing therefore for removals to larger towns, and the fact that before King Street was completed, several families occupied one or two rooms where they now occupy two or three;

I think, on a fair estimate, I am justified in placing the population at 6,800.

With reference to the division of the district into two portions, there are, as far as it is possible to ascertain, 98 houses outside the sewered part of the town, with an estimated population of 500, thus leaving a population of 6,300 for the town proper, and it is upon these figures that my calculations are based.

VITAL STATISTICS.

The total number of deaths registered in the whole district during the year has been 121, and the births 184, giving a death-rate of *17·79 per thousand, which is nearly 2 below, and a birth-rate of 27·05 per thousand, which is slightly over the average for the last ten years.

* 16·46 if the deaths of 9 non-residents be deducted.

The deaths of infants under one year number 15, giving an average death-rate per thousand births registered of 81·5, being 58·5 below the average for the last ten years.

The deaths, according to the classified table are as follows :—

Under 1 year, 15	1 year and under 5. 6	5 and under 15 2	15 and under 25. 4	25 and under 65. 38	65 and upwards. 56
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Of the latter no less than 17 were attributed to old age.

The deaths in public institutions in the district numbered 23, of which 9 were non-residents.

The following tables show a classified list of diseases to which the deaths are attributed, and the percentage of deaths caused by the various diseases.

*Measles, ...	3	Alcoholism, ...	1
*Whooping Cough, ...	1	Heart Diseases, ...	10
*Diarrhœa, ...	2	Accidents, ...	4
Enteritis, ...	5	Suicides, ...	2
Septic Diseases, ...	2	Congenital Debility, ...	5
Phthisis, ...	11	Alimentary Diseases, ...	5
Other Tubercular Diseases, ...	2	Urinary do., ...	10
Cancer, ...	6	Nervous System, ...	11
Bronchitis, ...	8	Senility, ...	17
Pneumonia, ...	4	Uncertified, ...	2
Pleurisy, ...	2	All Other Causes, ...	8

*Zymotic Disease.

	Town	C'ntry	Total	Av'g. for last 10 yrs.	Rate per 1000 per annum.			
					Town	C'ntry	Total	Av'g. for last 10 yrs.
Estimated Population	6300	500	6800	6734.8				
Births	172	12	184	179.6	27.3	24	27.05	26.97
Deaths from all causes ..	118	3	121	131.7	18.73	6	17.79	19.66
Deaths from Zymotic Disease ..	6		6		.88		.88	
Deaths from Phthisis	10	1	11		1.58	2	1.74	
Deaths Respiratory Disease ..	14		14		2.05		2.05	
Deaths from Cancer	6		6		.88		.88	
Infectious Notifica- tions	7		7		1.02		1.02	
Deaths under one year	14	1	15	25.1	*82	*83.3	*81.05	*140

*Rate per 1000 births registered.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES.

The town has been remarkably free from infectious disease during the past year, 7 cases only having been reported, of which 3 were Scarlet Fever, 3 Erysipelas, and 1 Diphtheria, and it was only necessary to remove one case of Scarlet Fever to the hospital.

In several of the cases the drains were tested and found defective; these have since been remedied.

The rate per thousand of persons attacked by infectious disease is 1.02, and I am glad to say no deaths have occurred.

The Small-Pox Hospital Scheme has advanced a step during the last 12 months, plans for the building having been submitted and approved, but as yet no tenders have been invited.

In addition to the ordinary notifiable infectious diseases, we have had a few cases of Measles and Whooping Cough.

I pointed out last year the advantages of adding Chicken-Pox to the list of notifiable diseases; this recommendation has, however, not yet come under consideration.

In concluding the foregoing remarks relating to the vital statistics and infectious diseases, I congratulate the Council on the favourable report I am able to present, but at the same time it must be remembered that under the law of averages, if we have a favourable report one year, we must expect a less favourable one in the early future.

WATER SUPPLY.

Of all questions before the Council concerning the Public Health, I consider that of a good water supply to be of paramount importance. It is in my opinion a matter of the most urgent necessity to provide the town with a plentiful supply of pure water on the constant system.

I have in various reports pointed out the danger of the intermittent system to which we have again been unfortunately subjected during the past year. The town mains were shut off on 98 nights.

Owing to the dry summer, and the fact that we are partly dependent on surface springs; the supply of water was greatly diminished, and it became necessary to augment the same by steam pumping at Rugley Springs. This began in July and ceased in October, adding 3,500,000 gallons to our other supplies.

In June the Council commenced pumping from Horsley's Artesian Well in Craster Place, and in 82 days added a supply of nearly one million gallons.

I regret that, in addition to these supplies, I have every reason to believe that Rugley Burn has also contributed its quota.

Rugley Burn takes its rise on Alnwick Moor and with its tributary feeders flows through both moor and arable land. It is, in short, low-land surface water, and to rely upon such water to augment a deficient supply in dry weather is to court the risk of a serious epidemic owing to the impurities it contains.

Of all sources of supply low-land surface water is the worst. It is especially liable to contamination, owing to the presence of the excreta of cattle and sheep and from surface washings of fields which have been recently manured, added to which are the possibilities of contamination by human beings.

I cannot, therefore, too strongly urge the Council to deal without further delay with the question of the water supply, as from its scarcity and quality it is an imminent source of danger to the health of the town.

Considering the gravity of this question, it should take precedence in the deliberations of the Council, over the Canongate Sewage Scheme or the Housing of the Working Classes.

I am pleased to say that this subject has already received attention at the hands of the Water Committee, and hope that their efforts to procure an efficient supply will speedily be crowned with success.

In concluding my remarks on this subject I would draw the Council's attention to the terrible epidemics which have occurred in different parts of the country owing to the contamination of drinking water, and would warn the Council of the grave responsibility which would no doubt be attached to them, in case an epidemic broke out in this town, attributable to the neglect on their part to provide a pure and wholesome supply.

SEWERAGE AND DRAINS.

The Sewage Committee after much thought and consideration presented a scheme to the Council for taking the Canongate sewage to Hesleyside by gravitation, treating it there, and also for the improvement of the existing Sewage Works.

In the month of September an enquiry was held by the Local Government Board with reference to the application to borrow £6,850 to carry out this work. The sanction of the Board was however refused, and it will be necessary therefore for the Council to devise some other method of dealing with the question.

Wherever local defects have been found in the drainage of the town they have, as in the past, been promptly remedied.

SCAVENGING.

The scavenging of the town continues to be conducted with efficiency. There is at times however a difficulty in obtaining a suitable tip for the mud. It is unfortunate that owing to the physical peculiarities of the district, the heavy lead of the town refuse up Clayport Bank cannot be avoided. The only alternative that I can propose is my previous suggestion of a Destructor, for which there is ample room at the Sewage Works. This would also solve the difficulty of the disposal of the sludge from the tanks, which could be dried and burned on the spot.

ERECTION OF HOUSES.

The total number of dwelling houses completed and occupied during the year is as follows:—Single houses 6, equal to 6 dwellings.

Urban Council's houses in King Street 28, equal to 56 dwellings, making the total number of houses of all classes 34, equal to 62 dwellings.

The houses at present in course of erection number 4.

The Council received plans for the conversion of certain property in Fenkle Street into Stores and a dwelling house which were very properly rejected for want of backyard space.

LODGING HOUSES.

The Lodging Houses have been inspected at various times during the year and were found to be in a satisfactory condition.

SLAUGHTER HOUSES.

The Slaughter Houses, though not all that one could desire, are satisfactory, and I am given to understand they compare very favourably both in structure and cleanliness with Slaughter Houses in other parts of the country. The practice of depositing manure for Allotment Gardens in close proximity to the Slaughter Houses still continues. I have previously referred to this as objectionable, and should be glad to see it abolished.

CATTLE MARKET.

During the year pressure has been brought upon the Council to remove the Cattle Market from Bondgate Hill and the Market Place, and the Committee have reported in favour of a site for a new Mart in the Wagon Way Road.

There are differences of opinion as to the effect which this removal will have upon the trade of the town, into which question it is not my province to enter. I can, however, confidently state that the removal of the Market will be a sanitary improvement.

DAIRIES AND COWSHEDS.

These have been inspected from time to time, and in all cases where suggestions have been made for minor improvements they have been readily complied with.

The milk supply for the district is still quite unequal to the demand. It is true there is a night and morning delivery, but in the case of anyone requiring extra milk during the day there is very often great difficulty experienced in procuring it.

With reference to this subject I would refer to my remarks in last year's report.

FACTORIES AND WORKSHOPS ACT, 1901.

I append a report dealing with the working of the above Act.

The Bakehouses have been inspected during the year and found to comply with the Inspector's requirements.

One new Bakehouse on modern lines has been erected in Gill's Lane.

INFECTIOUS HOSPITAL.

The alterations at the Hospital have been completed. They are a decided improvement and tend to the comfort of both the inmates and attendants.

PUBLIC MORTUARY.

I have again to call attention to the necessity for a Mortuary, the reasons for which I have in previous reports pointed out.

GENERAL IMPROVEMENTS.

During the past year a tank has been constructed on Clayport Bank with a capacity of 12,000 galls to conserve the spring water that formerly ran to waste down the hill, this has been connected with hydrants in various parts of the town and used for watering the streets, washing the market-place and flushing sewers and has proved to be of great value by saving the domestic supply. A new sewer has been carried up Denwick Lane as far as Allerburn which can be connected with that from the New Buildings and would form a relief to the main sewer in wet weather.

NARROW LANE FROM CLAYPORT TO HOPE HOUSE.

The Council has applied for powers to close the lower portion of this lane which is now unnecessary, owing to the opening of King Street and the back lanes in connection therewith.

The back street in Wagon Way Road and the footpath leading from Bondgate to Denwick Bridge have been laid with asphalt, which is a decided improvement, the latter having proved a great boon to foot passengers in wet weather.

If the Council could see its way to do so, I would suggest that the footpath leading from the Royal Oak to Alndyke, and other footpaths in the district be treated in a similar manner which I have no doubt would be greatly appreciated by the public.

The large water cart has been fitted with an arrangement for flushing low gradient sewers. This however has not yet been put into use, but I have not the slightest doubt that next year the expense incurred will be justified.

REQUIREMENTS.

In addition to the requirements previously referred to in this report, there is still a great need in the town for house accommodation for the purely labouring classes.

If a suitable type of house could be erected to supply the wants of this part of the community it would be possible to deal more effectually with the unsatisfactory houses at present existing.

The road to the Fever Hospital is again in a very bad state owing to increased traffic to the Railway Cottages, the difficulty in conveying a patient along it is very great, to

say nothing of the discomfort experienced by a sick person, while the annoyance to the inhabitants of Victoria Terrace will be in proportion to the amount of mud or dust in wet or dry weather. This road should be widened, properly made and taken over by the town.

In concluding my report I would call the attention of the Council to the administration of the Vaccination Act.

This is at present entirely in the hands of Boards of Guardians and it seems to me incongruous that a public body which practically consists of the members of the Rural District Council, should have jurisdiction over a sanitary measure in a district, in which all other matters concerning the public health are ruled by the Urban Council.

I add the report of the Inspector of Nuisances which shows the various improvements effected during the year, and I have again to express my thanks to him and the other officials for their co-operation, and the help which they have so willingly given me, in the carrying out of my duties, and finally I have to thank the Council for the courtesy and consideration with which they have received my reports and suggestions.

REPORT OF THE INSPECTOR OF NUISANCES.

COUNCIL OFFICES, GREEN BAT, ALNWICK,

JANUARY 24TH, 1906.

TO THE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH.

SIR,

I beg to submit to you the principal items of Sanitary Work carried out during the year 1905, as recorded in my "Journal."

The total number of Nuisances abated, as result of notice given to parties responsible for conditions which were detrimental to the public health have been 425.

A large number of these were the result of neglectful habits of persons who, as occupiers, did not realise the responsibility of individual action, in order that the surroundings of themselves and neighbours might be of the best; I am, however, glad to report that the number of cases, where pressure is necessary to obtain cleanliness, are a diminishing quantity each year, and that the conditions in tenemented properties are very much to the advantage of the occupier, when compared with former years.

Another feature which I believe speaks to a higher ideal in sanitary matters, by those living in the poorer parts of the town, is the better use made of such arrangements as are provided for the removal of waste matter from dwelling houses, as evidenced during past years in the lessened number of nuisances which owners have been called upon to abate.

During the last year a large number of structural defects have been remedied by carrying out repairs or improvements to drains, at different properties; and a good proportion of these were cases where a complete overhaul, not only of drains, but of the sanitary arrangements have been effected, and in place of a defective system these premises are now served with modern up-to-date systems; the parties responsible for these improvements, were notified of defects owing

to the drains failing to stand the smoke-test when applied ; the number of cases where the test did not locate any defect amounted to 20 per cent of the total number tested.

Drains which were imperfectly trapped to the number of 42, have been trapped with gully or intercepting traps, and 12 have been ventilated by vent shafts.

On other premises where the drains are in order, a continued improvement on past years is being brought about by the substitution of modern forms of w.c. arrangements ; pedestal basins are replacing defective pan, valve, and other obsolete forms of basin, the number of such this year is 27, the flushing arrangements of 24 closets have been improved by replacing defective cisterns with syphonic cisterns.

In addition to these improvements, very extensive alterations in the sanitary arrangements at Alnwick Castle and Allerburn have been carried out during the past year, apart from any action on my part. The work at the Castle consisted of a complete overhaul, and bringing up to date of the sanitary arrangements, and during the progress of the work I had the privilege on several occasions, through the courtesy of those in charge, of looking over it. The alterations at Allerburn were also a complete overhaul and renewal of the drainage system and sanitary arrangements of the place, and while the work progressed I kept myself in touch with it, and was fully satisfied with the painstaking way in which the officials of the North Eastern Sanitary Association saw to the carrying out of the work. The carrying forward of the sewer in Denwick Lane to Allerburn gateway made it possible to connect the new drains to the sewer, instead of emptying into cesspool, as under old system.

CLEANSING DEPARTMENT.

In connection with the Cleansing Department the providing of a larger tank to store water on Clayport Bank, has proved of great benefit for cleansing and street watering purposes ; not only is there an ample supply for washing the Market Place and Hill on days when market is held, a sufficiency of water for watering streets on the driest of days, but a great saving of time is effected by water carts being filled in a fraction of the time it took to fill from old tank. A feature of importance in connection with this new storage tank, is the fact that the water in the old tank is now available for flushing sewers, at a time when the town water is not to be had for that purpose ; every advantage was taken to flush the various sections of the sewers that were connected with this old tank, during the dry weather last summer.

A system of waste paper collection from business premises, has been instituted during the year, with a view to minimising the nuisance caused by waste paper from ash boxes, blowing about the streets during high winds, and a satisfactory improvement has resulted from it.

JOSEPH MILBURN,

Assoc. Royal San. Inst.,

Inspector of Nuisances